Heterarchy and Hierarchy among the Ancient Mongolian Nomads

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ABSTRACT

In this paper the social hierarchy of several ancient Mongolian polities from the 3rd – 2nd centuries BC to the 3rd century AD is described in terms of heterarchy, hierarchy, and chiefdom. These polities are characterized by the similar ecological environment, common cultural space, and common frontier with the Chinese civilization in the south and nomadic Xiongnu empire in the west. However, these ancient Mongols' polities differed in social complexity level. In this paper it is discussed how and why this happened.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, the prehistoric nomads were considered as tribes and chiefdoms. The term *tribe* is discredited in the contemporary anthropology of nomadism as a product of colonialism (Sneath 2007). The theory of chiefdom is also subjected to criticism as an outdated and incorrect one (Yoffee 2005; Pauketat 2007). It is necessary to agree with some part of criticism. Actually, the term *tribe* is often associated with the words 'wild' and 'outdated'. By no means, all complex pre-state polities were chiefdoms. The direct analogies between the ethno-historical cultures and pre-historic societies are often erroneous. However, the negation of the previous theories without suggesting some new theoretical ideas is not a good alternative.

In this article I will try to show by the example of the pre-historic Mongolian nomads of the Inner Asia that the classical

terminology has a heuristic utility. The ancient Mongolian no-mads – the Wuhuan and Xianbei – migrated in the last centuries BC – first centuries AD mainly in the territory of Inner Mongolia as well as, partially, in the neighboring geographic areas. The Xianbei, after the collapse of the Xiongnu empire, had extended their influence to the whole territory of the present-day Mongolia. In the 2nd century AD, they created the great steppe empire.

The main sources on the Wuhuan and Xianbei history are in-formation from Chinese chronicle *Hou Han shu* (*History of the Later Han Dynasty*) by Fan Ye, chapter 90, and *Sangokuzhi* (*Records of Three Kingdoms*), *Wei-shu* (*History of Wei Dynasty*), chapter 30 by Chen Shou. These data have been translated into Russian (Bichurin 1950 [1851]; Taskin 1984), German (Schreiber 1947), and French (Mullie 1969). In China the thorough studies of these peoples were published considering as narrative sources (Ma Chanshou 1962; Lin Gan 1989; Liu Xueyao 1994; Mi Wenpin 2000, *etc.*). The Xianbei archeological sites were unknown for a long time. Only quite recently in China and in the Eastern Baikal area there was discovered the archaeological cemetery of the Xian-bei culture (Su Bai 1977; Gan Chzigeng and Sun Suzeng 1982; Mi Wenpin 1994; Yu Suhua 2002, 2006; Yaremchuk 2005; Kovychev 2009, *etc.*). For this reason, I will generally use the written sources concerning the Wuhuan and Xianbei.

THE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The theory of chiefdom is among the fundamental achievements of the cultural anthropology. The maximum contribution to its devel-opment was made be the Second-Wave neo-evolutionists – Elman Service (1962, 1971), Marshall Sahlins (1968, 1972) and Robert Carneiro (1981). Later the subsequent progress could be related to the fundamental articles and books by Timothy Earle (1987, 1991, 1997, 2002). The chiefdom is considered as the first form of the so-cial hierarchy that precedes the state origin. There are several popu-lar definitions of the chiefdom. Service has defined the chiefdom as an intermediate form of socio-political organization with the central-ized administration and inherited clan hierarchy of theocratic chiefs and elite where the social and property inequality exists but there is no formal and legal repressive machinery (Service 1975: 15). Carneiro (1981: 45) believes that the simple chiefdom is a group of

communal settlements united under the permanent control of the supreme ruler. Earle believes that the chiefdom is a polity with population of, at least, several thousand people in which there are political centralization and regional hierarchy of settlements, social hierarchy and forming institutionalized financial system (Earle 1997: 121).

There is a number of papers where the basic statements of the chiefdom theory are described in detail (Service 1962, 1971; Carneiro 1981, 2002; Drennan and Uribe 1987; Earle 1987, 1991, 1997, 2002; Kradin 1995; Redmond 1998; McIntosh 1999; Skalník 2004, *etc.*).

If summarize different points of views on the chiefdom essence, the following major attributes can be identified:

(1) Hierarchical organization of power which is expressed in the settlements' size according to archaeological sources.

(2) Social stratification and restricted access to important resources. The tendencies of separation of endogamic elite from ordinary masses into the closed estate. In accordance with archaeological data, it is reflected in the funeral rites.

(3) In many chiefdoms there is a redistribution of the surplus product and gifts. The chief's power is based on the prestige economy.

(4) The chiefdom is characterized by a common ideological system and/or common cults and rituals. Some researchers believe that the supreme power in the chiefdom is of a sacralized, theocratic nature.

Depending on the complexity level, the chiefdoms are generally subdivided into simple, complex and supercomplex ones. *Simple* chiefdoms are characterized by single-level hierarchy. It is a group of communal settlements subordinate hierarchically to the chief residence. The *complex* chiefdoms consist of several simple chiefdoms. Their population already numbered dozens thousand people. In such polities, elite did not work like ordinary people. Sometimes, such chiefdoms consisted of different ethnic groups (Carneiro 1981; Earle 1991). In some cases the complex chiefdoms could unite into the *supercomplex* chiefdoms. In general, the supercomplex chiefdoms with four-five levels of hierarchy were characteristic of the pastoral nomads. In the agricultural societies the state usually ap-

peared having obtained such number of the hierarchical levels (Carneiro 2000; Kradin 2000; Turchin and Gavrilets 2009).

In the 1970s – 1980s, the term *chiefdom* was used in all works on archaeology and anthropology of the complex societies. However, in due course the term chiefdom shared the fate of all the other terms. Every researcher interpreted this term in his own way. Some scholars go on proposing the absolutely different meaning. Long before the appearance of the term *chiefdom*, Lewis Morgan had introduced a concept of *military democracy*. He considered this term as a pre-state society. Following Engels, this term was widely extended in the Marxist anthropology and archaeology. There also have arisen many different interpretations. In accordance with one of them, the military democracy was already regarded as an early state (see Herrman 1982; Treide, D. and Treide, B. 1984; Guhr 1985; Kovalevsky 1986). The same also characterized other important terms in anthropology and history – *feudalism* and *tribe*. It is an inevitable course of events. But it does not mean that the old terms should be rejected.

Since the early 1990s the theory of chiefdom has been subjected to criticism (Yoffee 1993, 2005; Pauketat 2007; Sneath 2007). The critics use a similar method. They take old works (even books by Morgan) and create an image of a Crow Man. Then, they begin to criticize with enthusiasm the scarecrow of neo-evolutionism. The criticism seems convincing. The criticism of the medieval travelers' records on the people with heads of dogs and other animals would be also convincing. However, in fact, the theories in anthropology of neo-evolutionism and processual archaeology are not so bad as they are thought to be.

The critics' major serious counter-evidences reduce to the following: 1) a chiefdom does not evolve into the territorial state (Yoffee believes the city-state to be the first phase); 2) the political complexity has no dynamics; 3) ethnographic analogues and parallels are erroneous; 4) it is wrong to consider the ancient states as adaptive and functionally balanced systems.

I agree fully with the last item. The first item goes beyond the scope of the paper. The second one seems strange. Thus, every academic term during my teaching course I show my students a map which consists of four parts. The first one demonstrates the civilizations which had appeared before the birth of Christ. The second –

the states in 500 AD. The third map shows the states in 1000 AD, and on the last one there are presented states of the colonial period. Looking at this map, it is difficult to disregard the dynamics of political complexity and also the global transformation or evolution! It is also impossible to agree with the complete negation of analogies with the ethnic cultures of the colonialism period. No doubt, that the natural prehistory and primitive cultures of the colonial epoch are quite different. However, none of critics witnessed himself the natural prehistory and knows what differs it from the later times. Why do they take the right to assume that the things happened in that particularly way?

Yoffee proposes the American archaeologists to refuse anthropology for benefit of history. Such a tradition exists, for example, in Russia. There, the archeologists are trained at history departments. I can see both approaches and compare them. The Russian tradition has its advantages and disadvantages (see Klejn 1993). The anthropological knowledge of my countrymen is quite insufficient. Therefore, it is better to strive for a synthesis of all useful ideas rather than to reject something good.

The critics of the chiefdom conception confuse the cause and the effect. If the difficulties in interpretation exist, they are not connected with the fact that the chiefdom term has become obsolete. The only problem is the complexity of the archaeological interpretations. The data acquired by archaeologists as a result of excavations is very fragmentary. The number of artifacts increases permanently. The larger is the number of artifacts, the larger is the range of different interpretations. However, the reading of the critical essays arouses sadness for other reason. I do not observe any new ideas and concepts following a biting criticism. As it was quite explicitly pointed by David Webster in his review of Yoffee's book, his conclusions of the state origin are very close to the position of the persons he subjects to criticism. 'Not much here that anyone would have disagreed with 30 or 40 years ago' (Webster 2005: 263).

While interest in the chiefdom is cooling down, the opinion of the alternatives to the chiefdom – heterarchy – has appeared in anthropology and archaeology. The term *heterarchy* means a pattern of the interrelations between elements in the complex system when they are not ranked hierarchically or connected by the net-

work of complex relations (Crumley 2001: 24). Most probably, Colin Renfrew was the first to arrive at this idea (1974). However, he wrote about two variants of chiefdoms (*individualizing* and *group-oriented*). Quite a few researchers became immediately aware of the importance of this idea. Only later on it became clear that it was an important approach which was developed in fact simultaneously but with the use of different historical data and different terms developed by Yuri Berezkin (Middle East), Dmitri Bondarenko (pre-colonial Benin), Andrey Korotayev (highlander), Carol Crumley (Western Europe), Kristian Kristiansen (Scandinavia), Gary Fienman, and Stephen Kowalewski (Mesoamerica), *etc.* (Berezkin 1995; Crumley 1995, 2001; Korotayev 1995; Blanton *et al.* 1996; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000; Berent 2000; Kowalewski 2000; Wason and Baldia 2000; Feinman 2001; Bondarenko 2006; Grinin 2007; Kristiansen 2007, *etc.*).

What is the essence of this approach? The researchers identify two strategies which can be found in different cultures. The first (*hierarchical* or *network*) strategy is based on the power vertical and centralization. Here, one can find a concentration of elite's wealth through the presence of the dependence and patronage networks, a reflection of the social differentiation in the funeral rites, the elite's control over prestige goods trade, a development of handicraft for the top circles needs, the cults of chiefs and their ancestors, the reflection of statuses and hierarchy in the ideological system and architecture. The second (*heterarchical* or *corporative*) strategy is characterized by the distribution of the wealth and power, moderate accumulation, segmental social organization, society's economical efforts for the achievement of joint goals (food production, construction of fortifications, temples *etc.*), universalized cosmology, religious cults and rites. The architecture emphasizes the standardized mode of life.

It is significant to point that, when using this approach one should try to avoid some mistakes. The heterarchical strategy should not be considered as a more egalitarian and earlier one in comparison with the hierarchy. The heterarchy is not less complex than the hierarchy. As an example we can mention the Greek city-poleis and later medieval market town-states which were not simpler than the contemporaneous territorial kingdoms and empires of the West and East Asia.

The heterarchy – hierarchy strategies are not different lines of the political transformation. It is a dichotomy which can occur at different levels of complexity (Kowalewski 2000: 180). In the pre-state societies it is a dichotomy between complex communities and chiefdoms (Wason and Baldia 2000; Bondarenko 2007). Some researchers believe that the hierarchy – heterarchy dichotomy can be found in chiefdoms. Robin Beck, Jr., identifies the ephemeral *constituent* hierarchies in chiefdoms and authoritarian *apical* hierarchies (2003). Later on, it is a dichotomy between city-polities and territorial states (Berezkin 1995, 2000; Korotayev 1995), between early and mature states and their analogues (Grinin 2007, 2009).

To what extent are these ideas valuable for the study of the pastoral nomads? The cattle breeders and early pastoral nomads of the Eurasian Bronze Age created different forms of polities. Acephalous or headless segmental formations can be described through the heterarchy while the simple and complex chiefdoms through the hierarchy (Koryakova 1996; Hanks and Linduff 2009; Houle 2010, *etc.*).

The latter pastoral nomads in the Iron Age had more complex scale of political organization. At the lowest level, the families and clans of nomads could be combined into an acephalous heterarchical tribe or chieftainship, or hierarchical chiefdom (about the differences between the chiefdom and chieftainship see Redmond 1998).

A group of heterarchical tribes could be combined into an acephalous polity or a weak chiefdom. In their turn, the chiefdoms can be structured into a complex chiefdom or heterarchical confederation of chiefdoms. As an example of the last the confederation of the Khitah 'eight polities' in the 1st millennium AD can serve. All these structures were unstable like a steppe 'tumble-weed' and could change both in the number of levels and in strength of internal ties. The heterarchy – hierarchy dichotomy often depended on different objective and random factors including individual properties of leaders. In the time of a successful and charismatic chief, for example, the hierarchy of complex chiefdom could be created. After his death it could be transformed into the heterarchical confederation of chiefdoms. Below I will illustrate this by the example of the ancient Mongolian nomads.

THE WUHUAN CASE: ACEPHALOUS HETERARCHY

The Donghu is an archaeological culture of the slab burials of the 2nd – 1st millennium BC. This culture's sites are located in the East Mongolia and East Baikal area (Tsybiktarov 1998). The Donghu had a great polity which was nearly the same in power as Xiongnu. The Donghu were defeated by the chief of Xiongnu Maotun at the turn of the 3rd – 2nd centuries BC. Thereafter, the nomadic empire of Xiongnu was established.

The Chinese chronicles inform that Xianbei and the Wuhuan were the descendants of the Donghu. They lived to the east of Xiongnu territory. The analysis of the sources suggests that the Wuhuan had a multilevel social organization. One can quite surely identify its three main taxonomic levels.

1) The lowest levels: family (most likely, nuclear or restricted family) and kinship groups related by real blood relationship, livestock ownership and common economic interests. The Chinese chroniclers used the term *luo* (household) to describe this level of the nomads' social organization.

The Chinese historians describe the Wuhuan as typical pastoral nomads. 'They are skilful in riding and archery, graze cattle searching the places with [good] water and grass, have no permanent residence and, as a house, the domelike hovel the exit from faces eastwards, sunrise serves for them. They hunt wild birds and animals, eat meat, drink sour milk and make clothes of coarse wool and fingering' (*HHS* 90.1a–2a; *SZ* 30.2a; Taskin 1984: 63–64, 326). Among them, the gender division of labor existed. 'The women are able to embroider on a leather, to do figured embroideries, to weave the woolen cloths; men can make bows, arrows, saddles and bridles, forge arms from metals and iron' (*HHS* 90.1b; Taskin 1984: 64).

2) Medium levels: lineages and clans (Chinese *yiluo*). These levels were based on remote real as well as fictitious kinship, periodic economic relations, cultural, political, and ideological networks. These groups could do such common causes as well-sinking, shearing of animals, organization of festivals (wedding, initiations), funerals, common cults and rites, feud. The Wuhuan clans were headed by the leaders (*xiaoshuayi*). In the chronicles they are called 'small leaders'. 'They had no continuous family names,

but the personal names of their most valiant chieftains were used as family names' (*HHS* 90.1b–2a; *SZ* 30.2a; Taskin 1984: 63, 327).

Edward Evans-Pritchard (1940) explains such a custom by the absence in the acephalous societies of the institutions of administration. The leading lineage (or clan) exercises the function of the organism skeleton. Other lineages and clans join it by means of cognate or fictitious kindred, adoption, *etc.* The dominating lineage symbolizes ideologically the structural unity and substitutes the personal leader.

The Chinese historian described definitely the Wuhuan exogamy and feud. They 'in a rage, kill fathers and older brothers but never do harm to the mother because the mother has relatives and consequently the fathers and older brothers avoid the mutual revenge believing that they are the family foundation… A killing of the father or older brother is not considered to be a crime' (Taskin 1984*:* 327–328). This is an overestimation of the Confucian chronicler with respect to the steppe barbarians. The barbarians do not follow the main Confucius's commandments among which the respect of parents and elders is considered as one of the main properties. In reality any anthropologist knows that kinship, parents and elders have a very important meaning for a nomad.

Even in the first part of the 20th century Evans-Pritchard (1940) showed that the scales of the feud origin and its settlement depend in many respects on the extent of structural closeness of the conflicting groups. If these groups belong to different lineages, clans and larger groups then opposition appears between the formations. On the contrary, the close social relations exclude a traditional animosity. In case of the conflict within close groups, the relatives try to reconcile it as soon as possible. They have common economic interests and conflict can decrease the economic efficiency.

3) The highest levels: *bu* (group of nomadic households according to Chinese historians), the 'tribe' in anthropological terms. The nomadic tribes were mainly based on political, economic, cultural, ideological and other non-economic relations and were veiled in the form of fictitious genealogical kinship.

According to the chronicles, 'several hundred or thousand tents form *bu*'. Their numbers were from 5 to 10 thousand tents (Taskin 1984: 63, 68, 84, 327). The use of the term *tribe* in anthropology is subject to many discussions (Service 1962; Sahlins 1968; Ad-

ams 1975; Cribb 1991; Creamer and Haas 1985; Sneath 2007, *etc.*). After Morton Fried's book (1975), the term *tribe* was excluded from the series of mandatory forms of cultural integration (band – community – chiefdom – early state – national state). Actually, tribes only appeared as a response to external influences from more developed societies. However, to interpret the social organization of the pastoral nomads, the notions of community and chiefdom are useless. It would hold for both ancient Xianbei and later medieval Mongols. *Uruq*, *irgen*, *oboq* are something more than community but can not be interpreted as chiefdoms (on this term see Kradin and Skrynnikova 2006, 2009). For this reason, I think that to describe the Xianbei community (it would hold for all nomads) it is expedient to use the notion of tribe as structurally opposed to that of chiefdom. A tribe is an aggregate of the second level segments, a sum of *yiluo*. It is a *heterarchy*. Chiefdom could also be a sum of *yiluo*. However, while a tribe has no hierarchical organization of power, a chiefdom is a stratified community with a political *hierarchy*. In other words, the relationship between the notions of tribe and chiefdom as applied to pastoral nomads is similar to that between the *communal-nomadic* and *military-nomadic* aggregative situations of nomadic societies in terms of Markov (1976, 1978; König 1981). It is also necessary to recognize the tribe as an *acephalic* structure that has no fixed boundaries and general tribal government, as stated for the Nuer by Evans-Pritchard. It was the *heterarchical* organization.

Each segmental tribe of the Wuhuan was headed by the elective chieftain (*dazhen*). The chieftains had only personal authority. The Chinese historians write that 'they always elected the bravest and the sturdiest of chieftains and those who could best decide between litigants, trespassers, and disputants' (*HHS* 90.1b; Taskin 1984: 327). 'If there were mutual murders the tribes were told to avenge themselves and if vengeance went on indefinitely, they would apply to the head chief to arrange matters' (Taskin 1984: 328).

The Wuhuan *dazhens* were real heterarchical chieftains. Their statuses were not passed. They had no dependent groups. 'From the chieftain to down, each man had his own flocks and herds and managed his own property: no man served another' (*HHS* 90.1b; Taskin 1984: 63, 327). The chieftains had some powers. 'When-

ever the head chieftain had any orders, a piece of carved wood served as evidence of authority, although there was no writing system to convey messages from place to place'. Persons violating the chieftains' orders were sentenced to death. By the way, the inveterate horse rustlers were also subject to death. One more punishment was to banish criminals. 'The mutineers who are landed by the elders were not adopted by clans [*yiluo*] and clans try to banish them to the savage districts… They are banished in order to experience a bad situation' (*Ibid.:* 1984: 327–328). Generally speaking, this was equivalent to death.

The Wuhuan tribes did not form a common polity. They consisted of many acephalous segments. It was the *acephalous heterarchy*. In the period of the Xiongnu empire flourishing, the Wuhuan rendered tribute (Lidai 1961: 103; Taskin 1984: 297–298, 328). The local leaders were responsible for levy of tribute and this contributed to the accretion of their power. As a result, the inner stratification had developed. On the eve of the first Xiongnu civil war (60–36 BC), the social organization of the Wuhuan did not differ in the complexity from those of the tribes and chiefdoms joining the Xiongnu imperial confederation. It is confirmed by the fact that, in 73 BC, when the Chinese troops perfidiously attacked the Wuhuan, they killed about 6 thousand nomads and, among them, three elite representatives labeled in the chronicles by the Chinese term *wang* (Lidai 1961: 205). It is remarkable that the Chinese historian used the term *wang* (king) rather than the term *dazhen* (chief). This suggests an essentially different status of these persons. With establishing of the Xianbei imperial confederation, a considerable part of the Wuhuan joined it. The last information concerning the Wuhuan goes back to the early 3rd century AD.

THE XIANBEI EXAMPLE:
FROM HETERARCHY TO HIERARCHY

Unfortunately, there is little information in the Chinese chronicles concerning the Xianbei family, marriage, social organization or political systems. It is only known that among the Xianbei there was a custom to hold marriages at the traditional national spring festival (*HHS* 90.8a). We can, however, compare the Xianbei with the Wuhuan, their contemporaneous neighbors. The Chinese chronicles attribute the Wuhuan and the Xianbei to a common cultural

sphere – that of the proto-Mongolian Donghu – and inform us that the Xianbei customs and language were similar to those of the Wu-huan (Taskin 1984: 7, 329).

Therefore, based on our knowledge of the Wuhuan, one can assume that the Xianbei had the following forms of social organization: family (*luo*) – kin or clan (*yiluo*) – tribe or chieftainship (*bu*). Most probably, *luo* are individual ordinary or extended families. They were united by real kinship, common household and property for the cattle. *Yiluo* is a territorial group including the small family groups. The clans were based on both distant real and fictitious kinship, nomads' seasonal labor cooperation (repair of wells, shearing, *etc.*), necessity to defend the fellow tribesmen and to perform common cults and rites. The highest levels *bu* (a word can be translated 'a camping ground') are greater formations which could be both tribes or chieftainships and chiefdoms.

The main functions of the Xianbei *bu* (*i.e.,* tribes, chieftainship or chiefdoms, as the case may be) and their authorities were as follows:

a) the establishment of boundaries between the territories of tribes. This can be confirmed by the reference to the sources. In the *Sanguo zhi* it is reported that in the 220s the Xianbei chiefs Kebineng, Mixia, and Suli concluded a frontier agreement between tribal territories where 'there was a separating boundary for each of them' (Taskin 1984: 325–326);

b) the defense against external dangers (other Xianbei tribes, other nomadic peoples, Chinese armies) and, on the other hand, organization of raids on neighbors. The sources abound with reports of attacks on the border areas of China (further I will return to this point). There is a lot of data about internal conflicts between the Xianbei tribes, such as seizure of livestock and other plunder (*baranta*). Suffice it to mention the conditions of Tanshihuai's rising: Tanshihuai (fl. the late 2nd century), the first great leader of the Xianbei, gained authority over his fellow tribesmen in taking by force the livestock of the leader of the neighboring nomadic society Tanshihuai's grand-parents' herds (Taskin 1984: 330);

c) the settlement of internal conflicts concerning the border violations, stealing and theft of livestock, *etc.,* between separate tribal segments structurally opposed to each other;

d) probably, the organization of some tribal festivals and carrying out of cults and rituals for the tribe as a whole. The Xianbei

assemblies are mentioned in the chronicles (*HHS* 90.8a). Taskin (1984: 24) likens them, quite rightly, to Mongolian *quriltai*; hence, one can assume that similar traditions were also maintained at the lower tribal level;

e) the episodic economic activity in the form of battues. Although there are no mentions of Xianbei battues in the sources, this form of hunting was widespread among many nomadic peoples of the Eurasian steppes and, in particular, among the Shiwei and Khitan, who were ethnically related to the Xianbei.

The demography of the tribes was unequal. Thus, we have mentions of *bu* with five thousand people, several dozens thousand people, five thousand 'households' (about 25 thousand people), ten thousand soldiers and ten thousand tents (up to fifty thousand people); the largest had about twenty thousand 'households' – some one hundred thousand people (Kradin 1994; many comparative dates see in Cribb 1991). The chiefs of *bu,* tribes or simple chiefdoms, fulfilled the following functions: (1) Military: to organize the battle-worthy portion of the population for raiding, and to repulse neighboring tribes' raids (see, *e.g.,* Taskin 1984: 76, 80, 325). It is not accidental that courage occupied the first place among the important qualities ascribed to the most outstanding Xianbei chiefs, such as Tanshihuai or Kebineng (fl. the early 3rd century) (*Ibid.:* 75, 324, 330). One can remember that the rise of Tanshihuai began after he had dispersed the robbers attacking his nomadic camp; (2) Redistributive: the distribution of the booty taken during raids (mainly, on China) (*Ibid.:* 80, 324–325). In the sources, there is no information about the redistribution of internal resources; (3) Judicial: the settlement of disputes concerning the territories where nomads live, stealing of livestock, violation of customs, mutilation, murders, *etc.* When Tanshihuai came to power he laid out 'law rules for disposition of cases between innocent and guilty and nobody dared to break them' (*Ibid.:* 75, 330). The same duties are also mentioned with respect to his son, Helian (*Ibid.:* 80). One of the reasons for Kebineng's election as a chief was his equitable investigation of lawsuits (*Ibid.:* 324). However, it is unlikely that these actions were based on written law; (4) Foreign trade: control of the foreign trade with China and other peoples and countries (Taskin 1984: 325–326). It is possible that the chief should also perform other functions. At the same time, the most important affairs were

most likely examined at the great assembly of chiefs, to which a number of sources give passing mention (*Ibid.:* 70, 85, 329).

STATELESS EMPIRE AS A SUPERCOMPLEX CHIEFDOM

The foundation and flourishing of the Xianbei empire were directly related to the personality of Tanshihuai, a famous politician and military leader of the second half of the 2nd century AD. He got through a short (only 45 years) but stormy life. Under his leadership, the Xianbei had overridden the vast territories. Even the Chinese historians had to recognize the might of their threatening north neighbor:

> Having the numerous army, Tanshihuai has plundered the Han boundary lands in the south, repulsed the attacks of Tingling in the north, forced to retreat Buyeo in the east, hit upon Wusun in the west and captured all the former Xiongnu territories which extended from the east to the west more than 12 thousand *li* and from the south to the north more than 7 thousand *li* and were crossed by mountains, rivers and were rich in freshwater and brine lakes (*SZ* 30.6a; Taskin 1984: 331).

This imperial confederation of nomads was not a state. There is no information of the existence of government, functionaries and other government institutions. It was a supercomplex chiefdom. The confederation was divided by Tanshihuai into three parts: center, left and right wings. In *Wei-shu,* the most detailed version is given:

> He divided his lands into three parts: middle, eastern and western. Lands eastward from Youbeiping district to the Liaotung district, [possessions] and [tribe] Mo formed the eastern part where more than 20 nomadic polities were located. Mijia, Queji, Suli and Khuaitou were elders [of largest sites]. Lands from Yu-pei-ping district in the west to Shang-ku district composed the central [middle] part where more than 10 polities were situated, the elders [of largest sites] – Kezui, Queju and Mujung were major chiefs. Lands from Shang-ku district westward to Dunhong and Wusun formed the western part including more than 20 polities. The elders [of largest sites] were Zhijianluo, Loujihlu, Tuiyan and Yanliyou. All elders were subordinate to Tanshihuai (*SZ* 30.6a; Taskin 1984: 331).

This important citation requires some additional comments. First, the imperial confederation was multi-ethnic. In the end of the 2nd century AD not less than 100 thousand tents of the Xiongnu took the political identity of Xianbei (*HHS* 90.9b). This is a good example that the ethnicity in nomadic polities is of situational nature. Into the composition of metropolitan country, other peoples who formed the right (western) wing of empire were incorporated. The greater part of the ethnic Xianbei tribes was concentrated in the central and eastern areas of the steppe empire. This can be confirmed by the fact that the regions of eastern Mongolia and eastern Baikal (of the 'left wing') were areas of traditional residence of the Xianbei. It is just there that archaeological sites of their culture have been found. A part of the right wing separated from the confederation, but only the names of the chiefs listed among the left wing are mentioned in the sources. It is interesting that later on the eastern wing was governed by the Yuwen family (clan), which was of the Xiongnu origin.

Second, at the time of Tanshihuai, the strength of the Xianbei army reached one hundred thousand horsemen (Taskin 1984: 78). If one considers that all men were potentially warriors, and that the adult male population should amount to about 1/5 of the total population, one can assume that the total population was about half a million. On the basis of the tribes number, Taskin has come to similar conclusions about the Xianbei population (*Ibid.:* 44–45). The total number of *bu* was more than fifty. Each of them counted approximately ten thousand people and, therefore, two thousand fighting men.

After the death of Tanshihuai in 181 AD, the Xianbei confederation rapidly decayed. A generation later, however, according to Chinese sources, Kebineng managed to restore the military potential of the Xianbei. The strength of his army once again reached one hundred thousand horsemen (*SZ* 30.8a; Taskin 1984: 325). However, we should remember that the right wing did not belong to his confederation. Furthermore, the author of the *Sanguo zhi*, Chen Shou, wrote that Kebineng's military might could not be compared with that of Tanshihuai (*SZ* 30.8a; Taskin 1984: 325). Therefore, one can also assume that the number 'one hundred thousand' is a rough notation for 'very many'. The Chinese could hardly have a precise information about the number of nomads

who permanently traveled 'in search of grass and water' through pastures. In any case, the military power of the Xianbei was inferior to that of the Xiongnu nomadic empire, which had had three hundred thousand soldiers, *i.e.* three times 'very many'.

Third, the Xianbei had a triadic administrative system – a center and two wings. As we have seen above, such a system had been characteristic of the early Xiongnu. It was also found among the Scythians, among the Tuoba, at some periods of the Second Turk Khaganate, in the early Mongol empire, and among the Kalmyks. There are several viewpoints concerning the dual and triadic organizations. Possibly, the primary factor was the ruler's wish to increase his personal power, the triadic system fostering this better than the dual one.

Fourth, as we have seen, the most powerful among the lords of the Xianbei confederation, Tanshihuai, divided his power into three parts, and having done this he established a headquarters (*ting*) similar to that of the Xiongnu *chanyu*. It was located on the shore of the Čoču River at 300 and more *li* (*i.e.* more than 120 km, taking into account that the *li* is equivalent to 400 meters) to the north of Gaoli, *i.e.* the early Korean state Koguryŏ (*HHS* 90.14a). If the Chinese author is not mistaken, then the headquarters should have been located on the Manchuria territory. In connection with this, there are two questions to which I have no answer. The first one is how to rule over such a great territory, which is said to have extended more than 14,000 *li* (over 5000 km) from east to west and more than 7,000 *li* (almost 3000 km) from north to south (*HHS* 90.14a–14b). In the absence of developed means of communication, it seems practically impossible to rule over such a large country. The second question is: what part of the empire did Tanshihuai control himself when, to follow the chronicles, his headquarters was located in the left wing territory? It should be remembered, that the left wing region, would later come under control of the Yuwen, who were of Xiongnu origin. These questions should be examined in more detail. If Tanshihuai liked the locality near the Čoču River in the Tanhan mountains (Shiratori [1935: 51–52] believes this to be the Baishan mountain near the border between China and Korea), then it could be one of his seasonal headquarters. Being a nomad, he traveled several times a year.

WAR, POWER, AND RESOURCES

The rulers' prosperity depended on the well-being of their nomad subjects. This idea, repeatedly emphasized by researchers of the steppe world, is well confirmed by written and ethnographic sources. The chroniclers connect the successful character of the Tanshihuai and Kebineng regimes with the fact that they were fair and lavish rulers (Taskin 1984: 75, 324):

> All of the riches seized in the course of raids were fairly divided by Kebineng: he decided all right away and took nothing for his own; therefore, the people served him with all their forces and the elders of other nomadic groups had respect for him and were afraid of him (*Ibid.:* 325).

The political failures of Helian, Tanshihuai's son, on the other hand, are explained by his excessive greed and unfairness with respect to his subjects: the sources report that because of Helian's greed and debauchery, as well as unfair judgments on emerging disputes, half of his people arose in rebellion against him (Taskin 1984: 80).

As to the inheritance of power, one can say only a few words. First, it is not clear whether the titles of chieftains were handed down by the time when Tanshihuai came to power, or the chiefs were elected at the general meeting. Tanshihuai himself was an elected chief of his *bu* for his personal services. He was a courageous warrior and resolved justly the conflicts between herders. However, he became the leader of a confederation of tribes and chieftainships because other chiefs had submitted to his force (*HHS* 90.14a). In this case, we have two different ways of gaining power: elections and usurpation (or for some, both at the same time). But afterwards, the position of the confederation's main leader started to be handed down. Helian, Tanshihuai's son, too, became a leader of confederation. Here, we see a transfer of power from father to son. Thereafter, however, it was Helian's younger brother, Buduhen, who received the chief's title, because Helian's son was too young.

It is known from *Hou Han shu* (*HHS* 90.8a) that the Xianbei held a 'great meeting' (*da hui*) in spring. Later on, this notion designated as the Mongols' *quriltai* in the Chinese sources. Probably, these meetings were similar to those held by the Xiongnu at the end

of the spring (the Xiongnu chiefs met three times a year: at the beginning of the year, in spring and in September). We can assume that the legitimation of the confederation's leader was carried out at a great meeting.

It is known that the Xiongnu used the model of war and peace alternation in order to get prestige gifts (Barfield 1989; Kradin 2002). The Xianbei preferred to conduct the raids against their neighbors. The Chinese chronicles were overfilled with information of attacks of the Xianbei under Tanshihuai against their neighbors: the Xiongnu up to their final overthrow, against Dingling, Wusun, Buyeo, and, especially, China. Based on the sources, it was found that, partly, for a period of 80 years (from 97 to 178), the Xianbei conducted raids against the Later Han, at least, every three years – in 97, 101, 106, 115, 117–119, 121–124, 126–129, 132, 133, 156, 158, 159, 163, 166, 168–173(?), 174, 176–178. In 20 of the mentioned cases, the sources recorded the times of year when the raid was conducted: autumn – 8 times, winter – 7 times, summer – 3 times, spring – 2 times (Kradin 1994).

The autumn and winter seasons are explained by the following reasons. During this period, the nomads' horses gained strength while tillers finished harvesting. The Xianbei also practiced other forms of remote exploitation. They extorted gifts from the Chinese (Taskin 1984: 70, 86, 310). The chiefs having a monopoly for long-distance trade (*Ibid.:* 324, 326) attempted to dictate the prices at the Chinese markets.

In addition to nomads, the power of the Xianbei lords extended also over settled populations. If pastoral nomads themselves disdained sedentarization, they solved the problem of shortage of agricultural products by seizing people from settled states (*Ibid.:* 76, 80, 324), resettling them on lands they controlled and forcing them to cultivate the land. They may have also forced them to bring tribute. Craftsmen were also captured, and we can assume that both farmers and craftsmen inhabited such settlements. The cases of Chinese immigrants to the Xianbei are also known. It is due to them that at the time of Kebineng the Xianbei rejected smuggled iron weapons from China (Taskin 1984: 78), and instead began to produce their own metal arms (*Ibid.:* 324).

Nevertheless, all this gives the impression that the farmers' settlements established by the nomads were quite a few. Interestingly,

the Chinese chronicles record how anxious Tanshihuai was about the nomadic population growth. In order to extend the resource base, he ordered the resettling of about 1000 families of *woren* fishermen (Han according to another source) in the area near the Wuhoujin River (today's Laohahe River) so as to supply fish for nomads (Taskin 1984: 80, 331). This is all the more interesting, since it is traditionally assumed that nomads do not eat fish. But this may result from the influence of the religion. Prior to the introduction of Buddhism the situation was somewhat different. Some years ago my colleagues and I started to study the Khitan town of Chintolgoi in Mongolia, where I found traces of Bohai peoples who were also resettled to central Mongolia to provide nomads with foodstuffs. We found many bones of pigs and scales of different species of fish (Kradin and Ivliev 2008, 2009).

CONCLUSION

The old anthropological terms are as before of a heuristic importance. They reflect more exactly the dynamics of transitions than some new post-modernist terms such as headless state (the nomadic empires were not states, not all the more headless, see details in Kradin and Skrynnikova 2009). Before the formation of the Xiongnu empire the ancient Mongolian nomads Donghu had the great polity, maybe a complex chiefdom or a heterarchical confederation. Late in the 3rd century BC, they were headed by common chief (Lidai 1961: 16). After defeat in the war from the Xiongnu, this polity split into many segments. The Chinese ancient historians combined them in two ethnic formations: the Wuhuan and the Xianbei. The narrative sources present the Wuhuan as the acephalous segmental heterarchy. These were real headless tribal formations. Later the Wuhuan had more complex social organization. However, these were only 'secondary' tribes and chiefdoms. They could never create a powerful complex polity.

The Xianbei lived to the north of Wuhuan. They occupied a more advantageous geographical position. Randall Collins believes that the marchland advantage is an important strategic factor which contributes to the geopolitical growth and expansion (Collins 1978). It is possible that this is the case for the Xianbei. The Xianbei had tribes and chiefdoms which could be periodically combined into the heterarchical confederations and complex chief-

doms. Their might could be confirmed by the successful raids on China and the Xiongnu. Of great importance was the fact that, after the collapse of the Xiongnu imperial confederation, many Xiongnu entered into the Xianbei polity.

Due to the charismatic personality of Tanshihuai, the nomadic Xianbei empire was established which occupied much the same territory as the Xiongnu polity. It was the supercomplex chiefdom. However, the Xianbei did not use the wise Xiongnu policy of gifts extortion. They preferred to plunder China. In addition, the late dynasty was in crisis at this time. This has also interfered with long hegemony of the steppe empire. The political organization of the Xianbei differed from that of the Xiongnu. The Xianbei had no developed tradition of the power inheritance by one clan. They could not suppress the steppe tribalism.

Tanshihuai lived only 45 years. After his death, his son Helian became the ruler of the Xianbei polity. He was greedy and unjust. Therefore, a half of the chiefdoms moved on him. Shortly after, he was killed during China campaign. The confederation split at once into several parts. These polities were at war with each other. Sometimes, the chiefs held the general meetings (congresses). Over this period, the Xianbei had the heterarchical confederation of chiefdoms and tribes instead of a stateless empire.

At the turn of the 2nd – 3rd centuries the other leader of not a great tribe or chiefdom Kebineng combined the majority of the Xianbei polities. The Chinese chronicles show that he was a bold commander, impartial judge and lavish chief. He distributed the whole plunder among his soldiers (*SZ* 30.7b). However, Kebineng was not able to unite all the Xianbei polities. It is known that there existed several confederations. He became the leader of the strongest and dangerous for China confederation. After he was killed by the Chinese spy, the Xianbei was divided into the antagonistic groupings. These examples suggest a continuous change in the heterarchical (acephalous, tribal) and hierarchical (chiefdoms) tendencies in the nomadic society.

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